



June 29, 2022

A Note from Anthony Coy-Gonzalez

**Dear Friends,**

In the midst of such volatile times where up and down, past and present, new beginnings and déjà vu all seem intertwined, I reflect on the comforting words of **Jeremiah 29:11**: **“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

On good days and bad, I settle on these words to know that God’s plans are always better than mine and that those plans are unfolding each day into something greater than I can imagine.

On a warm Old Hilliard Day in 2005, the streets were lined with pop-up canopies, tables, and eager vendors. My mother and I, a mere 13 years old, shuffled through the crowd and happened on a booth where the one and only Lisa Collier was spreading the good news of Hilliard United Methodist Church’s upcoming anniversary.

Little did we know, that brief encounter was an introduction to a new family, a new home, and the unconditional love of Jesus.

**It was in those tumultuous high school years that I found refuge in the youth group, in a relationship with God, and where so many helped me build a foundation of faith and community.**

Thirteen years later, when Will and I had our four children — Chase, Noah, Casey, and Ethan — it is no surprise that HUMC was where we wanted to raise them.

From the lived-out words of “God Loves You No Matter What” and Godly Play to Faith Finders and the remarkable leadership of Nikki Buskirk, Lindsay Robinson, and many volunteers, **HUMC**



**has served as a safe place for our children.** This safe place has given them that refuge, a place of challenging discussions, and a place that is known by its love.

John 13:34-35: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”



**This year our kiddos had the joy of meeting people who were different from themselves, had opportunities to ask tough questions, and got to be a part of a faith community who loves all of its neighbors.**

Each week, they looked forward to seeing friends, having fun, learning about different walks of life, and having real, authentic conversations.

For months we continued these conversations at home about race, the experiences of our Black and Brown friends, the richness of different cultures, and the deep roots of racism that still surround the world in which we live.

They met with LGBTQ+ neighbors and found peace in the truth of God's love for all people, including their very own family.

They learned about the beauty of our Jewish neighbors and the painful history of the Holocaust.

**Each story offered a new lens and a thread that connected them to a larger world than they once knew.**

They would come home with a quiet (not in volume, because it is never quiet in the Coy-Gonzalez house) — a quiet sense of the feeling in their hearts that says I'm doing something really good, something that means something.

Throughout their time in children's ministry, they've loved and served their neighbors through notes of encouragement, bracelets, and fundraisers for inclusive faith communities. They brought friends to church, and they regularly turn heads in the community when conversations come up about their neighbors, turning heads because of the love being poured out from children's ministry.

Now, when they identify privilege or forms of oppression, they speak up and say, **"I learned that at church."**



When people talk about pronouns at Pride, they say, **“I learned that at church.”**

When people talk about religion, they say, **“God loves you no matter what. I learned that at church, too.”**

People want to know more about this special place. In a world that can seem so torn, our youth are becoming known for their love, setting an example for all of us in their words, deeds, and faith (1 Timothy 4:12).

As adults, we often say “If only I knew back then what I know now....” For our kids, I love that they are learning all of those “if only” lessons with their church family before they even reach middle school.

I can only imagine where they will go from here. As they venture out into the world a little more every day (wow, they grow up fast!), I return to the confidence in knowing that God’s plan is good and that **we have a community raising our children with us, a community known by its love.**

**This next generation at HUMC gives me great inspiration today and great hope for tomorrow!**

Thank you for being a part of our community that makes this possible.

With love,

Anthony



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God Loves You  No Matter What

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